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# ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

FORMERLY "THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT"  
OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE A.A.L.

## Folkestone Follies

PARISH PUMP PREVAILS

*Special L.A. Conference Number*

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NOVEMBER

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# THE ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

Official Journal of the Association of Assistant Librarians

(Section of the Library Association)

Edited by W. G. SMITH, Finsbury Public Libraries

VOL. 49 NO. 11

NOVEMBER, 1956

## *Editorial*

### **The Authority Vote**

"The time has come to abolish institutional membership." This was the inevitable reaction to the events at the last two annual meetings of the L.A. and it was being expressed even by some very senior librarians. This was not a case of sour grapes at being defeated on the A.G.M. vote but an expression of frustration that the professional affairs of our Association should be bedevilled by local politics and small-time politicians.

Even if local authorities were not members of the Association, there would be nothing to prevent their representatives attending our conferences—but they would be excluded from the A.G.M. One of the misconceptions obvious at this year's general meeting was the idea that the A.G.M. is part of the conference. It is not, and there is no reason why next year it should not be held quite separately from the conference. At the moment the privileged few librarians and authority delegates attend both the conference and A.G.M. at public expense and may vote against the interests of the bulk of A.A.L. members who are unable to attend. If the A.G.M. were held separately in one of the large cities each year, no one's expenses would be paid and all would have an equal chance of attending at their own expense. This coupled with a postal vote might achieve the desired result even if authority members remained in the L.A.

Other solutions are being canvassed. Neville Dain was talking about a series of general meetings of librarians held throughout the country, the authority members having one all of their own, and the voting results being totalled. Former Editor Arthur Jones is suggesting forming a Section of Chartered Librarians within the L.A. which could express a professional opinion. The difficulty about this, however, would be that any Section's opinion would have to go to a general meeting of the whole Association to be ratified.

Mr. Jones is right in maintaining that it is an expression of professional opinion that is required. Should all voting rights be restricted to chartered librarians? Should voting rights on professional matters only be restricted to them? Should a separate Chartered Librarians' Association be formed? Should full membership be restricted to Chartered Librarians with an associate non-voting membership for institutions and a student membership with a reduced subscription for younger librarians? We do not know the right answer but all these matters will be under consideration in the next few months. We should be glad to hear the assistants' views.

W.G.S.

# Folkestone Follies

## *Your Editor's View of the Library Association Conference and A.G.M.*

Eric Moon and I roared into Folkestone by motor-cycle on Tuesday morning to find our hotel largely occupied by Mr. O'Leary, who promptly declared his intention of pushing us off the cliff. We had considered arriving the previous evening for the official conference reception—"Evening dress and decorations," said the programme—but with our customary restraint we sacrificed the opportunity to appear in pyjamas and paper-chains.

### ***Too Much Fiction***

We struggled up the cliff in time for the Presidential Address—and it was worth the effort. We hear so much about the L.A. being dominated by public librarians that it was a surprise to find that Mr. Sydney is the first President to come from anything but a large public library. Libraries are providing too much fiction, he said, hastily adding that he had no intention of cutting it out altogether. It is taking "an unfair portion of our money, time and skill in view of all the other pressing intellectual, cultural, scientific and technical needs which it should be our prior responsibility to serve."

We should aim at the intelligent minority, he said, adding that too many of us were trying to build librarians' libraries instead of *public* libraries.

It is interesting to find that both the L.A. and A.A.L. Presidents this year have condemned the influence of the *Daily Express* in their Presidential addresses. No doubt we shall soon be aligned with the British Council as chief target for the Beaverbrook bull.

### ***Canute and the Television***

A charming lass, Miss Ursula Eason, who is the Assistant head of Children's Television in the B.B.C., gave an admirable short talk on relations between reading and viewing. She deplored as much as any of us the hypnotic effect that TV has on some children and claimed that the B.B.C.'s policy is to encourage them to engage in many other activities as well as viewing. Serialised books, book-talks, dramatised excerpts had all been tried but it is difficult to estimate their effect, and Miss Eason asked for our advice. She received little. Children's librarians were conspicuously absent and the librarians who spoke abandoned their professional rôle and talked as parents (perhaps they felt fatherly towards Miss Eason). Amidst the touchingly sentimental tales of their little ones, most of them at least recognised that TV is here to stay and that the B.B.C.'s main job is to produce good television, not merely to act as an advertising medium for the public library. Not so one Authority member from Bootle—I don't know his name but suspect it's Canute—who seemed to be blaming TV for all modern evils including the latest G.C.E. results in Bootle.

### ***Optimist from UNESCO***

Staggering down the cliff-path in the early hours of the morning, Eric Moon declared that if he stayed in Folkestone much longer, he'd look like a mountain goat. No comment.

Next morning we were addressed by Dr. Herbert Coblans, an

optimist from UNESCO, who declared that we are not hidebound by obsolete techniques. Our thoughts dwelled on the Browne charging system and all the cataloguers drearily dribbling out entries that the B.N.B. would do for them at a fraction of the cost. Dr. Coblans had, however, passed to more solid stuff and was dealing with the work of UNESCO and other international bodies in documentation, abstracting, translating, and so on. One was impressed with the progress made in the colossal task of getting the right information to the individual from the mass of material in many languages.

### ***'Precious Librarians—Open Your Minds'***

In the discussion, an authority delegate declared that librarians are "precious." Open your minds to science, he said, stop this snobbish superiority of the humanities. Mr. Noble, a public librarian, promptly exhibited himself as the sort of person the authority member had in mind. "It's not our job," he said, "to provide detailed scientific information"—he did not suggest whose job it was and one was reminded of the President's warning about the public library becoming purveyors of material of little worth. Mr. Hutchings pointed out that it was time our examination syllabus was geared to this modern librarianship instead of being "rooted in the concepts current about 1900." The L.A. should put him on its Education Committee on the strength of that remark.

### ***Louder and Funnier***

As usual, librarian-speakers at Conference were shown up by an outsider, this time by Mr. John Cutforth, who declared at the outset his intention of being louder and funnier. He successfully debunked many current conceptions about children's reading, particularly in relation to their mental development. Children need recreation as much as adults, and Biggles and Blyton was as good a way as any of getting it. He condemned the over emphasis on Dickens and Scott in children's libraries and asked that recreational reading, even comics, should not be excluded from the schools. Comics, he felt, caused more emotion in adults than children, just as the alleged "horror" in some of Grimm's tales seemed to upset the parents but actually had no adverse effect on children.

### ***Fatheads***

Liverpool's Dr. Chandler, pugnaciously provincial—one expected him to demand home rule for Liverpool—demanded that a vast expansion of the main provincial libraries should be given national priority. They should consist of large specialist departments with specialist staff to exploit them and the emphasis changing from books to documents of all kinds.

Mr. O'Leary declared that we were fools and fatheads to expect any kind of government aid for libraries; the government allowed less for pictures for the national gallery each year than is spent on books in Dagenham. The large provincial libraries should concentrate on providing books for the common man and woman, books for children in profusion. He did not think they were doing even that at present and condemned Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham as places spending less on books than the minimum recommended by the L.A. Replace the dirty, neglected bookstocks in most of our large cities, he said, before thinking of Oriental and other specialists. Dr. Chandler, not visibly affected by the onslaught, reminded us that it was not merely a question of aid but of persuading the government to allow Liverpool to spend even its own money on building libraries.

### **No Work in Progress**

This question of new buildings was also in our minds when we saw the conference exhibition of photographs of libraries throughout the world. Particularly striking were the German contributions showing an imaginative use of colour and decoration in their attractive new buildings. Mr. McColvin drew attention to the fact that new libraries were being built in Germany while in this country we were at a complete standstill on library construction. The President had earlier pointed out that in the days of the pre-war depression many fine libraries had been build ; now we are prosperous and nothing is done. Mr. Best Harris told how in Plymouth, luxury retail stores were erected as first priority after the blitzes, so that Plymouth had the best display of ladies' lingerie this side of Paris before even considering rebuilding its demolished central library.

Something is wrong with our sense of values; something is equally wrong with our sense of public relations.

#### **JUST PLAIN LOGIC**

- (1) A "new" Town (Harlow in Essex) is born.
- (2) Its new Public Library (Essex County Branch) is organised.
- (3) KEESING'S is installed\* (to give to its new citizens constant access to factual data on Current Affairs the world over).

\*Retrospectively from 1952  
in this case.

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## THE A.A.L. SESSION

### *Subscription Library Types — Library School Bunkum — Library Rats — Professional and Non-Professional Staff*

Mr. O. S. Tomlinson, Finchley's Deputy, rattled out at express speed a chain of sensible comments at the A.A.L.'s own session. There was little new in his speech but much that needs saying over and over again. Your officers were particularly encouraged when a chorus of approval greeted his remark about members accepting posts at inadequate salaries: "WE MUST NOT RAT ON OUR COLLEAGUES." The Hon. Secretary's gaze was seen to be directed steadfastly at one particular rat. Mr. Tomlinson complained that we were always the last to get a cost-of-living rise and always the first to be asked to set an example of restraint to others. We should be valued as teachers who automatically progressed to £900 a year with extras for special responsibilities. We now have the ridiculous position of a janitor sometimes getting more pay than the librarian in charge of him.

Tomlinson's four-point programme for public library efficiency was declared as:—

- (1) The system must be large enough. Many are not.
- (2) We should examine the present co-operation schemes and revise them as necessary. The supply of periodicals, in particular, is inadequate.
- (3) The internal organisation of each system needs to be replanned to cater for the particular demand on that library. Different approaches are needed for various levels of provision.
- (4) Staff should be divided into professional and non-professional groups, but without any lowering of standard for either. The first stage here must be to get re-graded to A.P.T. the many staff on general division doing semi-professional work.

### *The Library Schools*

Some mild praise for the library schools followed, although Mr. Tomlinson thought they ought to be attached to major libraries instead of being out in the wilderness as some are now. It was refreshing to hear him condemn the current theory that only students over the age of 21 should be admitted to the schools. There is no need, he said, to wait for long years in a library before attending a school as anyone can pick up routines at any time. I hope that this will effectually scotch this dictum of the school pundits which condemns all young librarians to the general division until they are about 23 (and even then there is the Final Examination to be taken).

The people with wide general interests who used to be our recruits now go to universities—so we must get graduates and pay them enough. In the discussion, Nottingham's Peter Churley added point to this by comparing his salary with that of his friends at university who had chosen other professions.

### *Welcome the Subscription Library Refugees*

It is common to hear librarians condemning the influence of those members of the public who, being now unable to afford the subscription of commercial libraries, have turned to the public libraries. It is nonsense, declared Mr. Tomlinson, to treat them as a menace. Their standard

of demand is high. These are the people who are seriously interested in books, the people we should welcome to our doors.

### ***Abolish the First Professional Examination***

The discussion was meagre but it was good to hear at last someone condemning that pernicious imposition on young librarians, the First Professional Examination. Carlisle's young chief, Kenneth Smith, maintained vehemently that it had no purpose and would have none unless it qualified students for the A.P.T. grades.

Some fears were expressed that division into professional and non-professional grades might result in a lowering of salaries for some. Ex-A.A.L. editor Mr. Stevenson, of Hornsey, refuted this by telling his fellow-chiefs how it is done. Get out a job classification. Many jobs require nothing but willing hands and willing bodies. This leaves over the professional work to be allocated to young professionals and, if they can be shown to be doing professional work, it will be easier to get better salary grades for them. "I have done it, and I know," he said.

## **THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

### ***—Parish Pump Politics***

A considerable tension pervaded the hall as we assembled for the A.G.M. Right from the start the Council was on the wrong foot when Mr. Davison, of the United Steel Companies, enquired why he had had no reply to three letters address to the Chairman of the Research Committee. It was unfortunate that the Chairman, Mr. Irvin, was not there, but even more unfortunate that no one on the platform displayed any concern at such rudeness to members. It is not an isolated instance; letters to the Editor of the *Record* sometimes result in nothing but a postcard acknowledgment and the A.A.L.'s Greater London Division has recently had the utmost difficulty in getting co-operation from the L.A. Library in the preparation of a Union List of Bibliographies and Reference Books. Surely an Honorary Officer or spokesman for the Research Committee could at least have promised Mr. Davison an investigation and explanation later.

### ***Your Vote Devalued***

The first explosion came on the proposal to abolish the postal ballot, a proposal which Councillor Thomas, of the *Parish* of Whitchurch, said was made because of the result of the postal vote last year. His seconder was supposed to be Mrs. Luxton, librarian of the same *Parish*, but she was too timid to come to the microphone and allowed her place to be taken by another authority delegate. This was typical of the way librarians at this meeting failed to stand up for their own professional rights and allowed themselves to be cowed by the politicians. The first blow for democracy was, however, struck by Birmingham's militant Chairman, who appealed to reason and sanity, and he was followed by a sober statement on behalf of the L.A. Council by Mr. Francis. Best speech of the day from a younger member came from Peter Pocklington, of Chelmsford, who pointed out that this proposal would disfranchise many responsible members of the profession who were unable to attend the A.G.M., including many deputies. Eric Moon reinforced this argument, condemning the small minds of the proposers and drawing the authority members' attention to the fact that their expenses to the meeting were paid for them while ours are not.

Ex-A.A.L. President, Mr. Pearson, made a most sensible contribution showing how small was the representation in the hall of special librarians who would in the main be deprived of their votes if this motion were passed.

Finally the motion was defeated—and your vote retained. On the next motion, however, the value of your vote was lessened by the acceptance of a proposal that anything referred to a postal ballot should require a two-thirds majority. It was unfortunate that this was not opposed strongly by the L.A. Council or by any A.A.L. representative. Some of us in the hall considered asking for a postal ballot but some quick arithmetic showed that it was not possible as less than a third of those present had voted against the motion.

### ***Parish Pump Prevails***

Next came the attempt to reverse last year's decision on the L.A. memorandum on local government organisation, the particular bone of contention being the proposal to abolish the independence of the very small units. It was obvious that the small library supporters had little conception of what a good library service can be; in fact, many of them did not even care since their only concern was the preservation of their own little empires. Mr. McColvin stuck to his guns and asked us to abide by the professional viewpoint arrived at in a true democratic manner last year. But the day belonged to the parish pump and we reluctantly acceded to the President's appeal not to take it to a postal vote. We hope, however, that in recording this decision, the Council will make it clear that this is the decision of a thoroughly unrepresentative general meeting *and not of the Association as a whole*. Until all members are consulted that policy remains as before.

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## Your Letters

*Elections — Underpaid Posts — The Eng. Lit.  
Exam — Public Relations — The Importance  
of Staff — Library Goonery — Small Libraries*

### **Blacklists and Blacklegs**

You have taken me to task in your September editorial for my attitude towards underpaid posts and the applicants for them which I expressed in a letter to the *Record*. Your parallel of me murdering my chief is irrelevant. Applying for an underpaid post, whilst being perhaps professionally unwise, is not the grave crime you make it to be.

The library profession is not without its qualified hard-working librarians and assistants, many of whom despite their employment by one or other of our "star" systems, are on salaries far from commensurate with their position and responsibilities. To such people some of the underpaid posts represent the possibility of an increase in status and salary and perhaps a move to a more congenial part of the country. In making their application, domestic circumstances will often rank higher than the opinion of the L.A. and of those of its members who howl "sob-story" when wife, family, the money, and home-town enter the discussion.

May I suggest that the sympathetic approach with regard to our readers' problems is not out of place when we are considering the problems of our fellow workers.

FRANK W. S. BAGULEY, *Berkshire County Libraries*.

It is time someone with no axe to grind brought a sense of values to bear on the question of underpaid posts. Your editorial comments are symptomatic of the prevalent irrational attitude that money is all that matters. It is easily overlooked that conditions of service in Public Libraries are already closely regulated. Therefore it is precisely the personal and local conditions that will influence an applicant in his choice of a job. You dismiss as sob-stories four perfectly valid reasons for such a choice, including, paradoxically, the need of the money. I wonder what motive, other than sheer altruism, you would find acceptable. It is difficult to tell whether your desire that the best man should get even an underpaid job is itself altruistic or merely ironic. I would define the best man for such a job as one who, while content to accept the advertised conditions as a start and under protest, would do his utmost to improve the status of his library and consequently his own status and salary.

When an applicant for an underpaid post contracts either Association, it is to be hoped that his case is considered on its merits. If, as a matter of course, he is merely warned not to apply unless the Association's protest is successful, then the Association can justly be accused of unwarranted meddling in personal affairs. But if he can make a *prima facie* case for taking the post at the salary offered, he could surely be advised to apply, and perhaps to raise tactfully the question of his salary at the interview.

It surprises me that advocates of expulsion seem to ignore the chief culprit, the employing Authority; perhaps this explains the suggestion that they are governed by personal animosity.

My case, then, is that a member is justified in accepting an underpaid post if it has for him compensating advantages, which may lie outside the scope of the National Scheme of Conditions of Service. It is not an impertinence for the L.A. to ask him to state these in outline, so that we may be satisfied that the interests of members are not inconsiderably being harmed. Yet if he should not wish to state his case, I would still re-echo Mr. Baguley's plea for tolerance; but perhaps that is because I am not directly concerned.

D. T. O'ROURKE, *University of Reading*.

I was pleased to see the publicity you have given to the underpaid posts problem, with fuller answers to Mrs. Firth and Mr. Baguley than I was able to do in the *Record*. There are two points, however, which receive no mention in your pages; both may help to bring about a successful solution of our problem.

Firstly, I firmly believe that the L.A. or (in default of action by that body) the A.A.L. should insert a notice in the next issue of any journal which has advertised a post at an inadequate salary that this *is*, in fact, such a post, and recommend intending applicants to seek advice. I know that Branch and Section Secretaries are notified and that an interested person can write to these people. But this is the wrong approach. The initiative should come from the Association. Can we be sure, otherwise, that every member, no matter what remote corner of a Division he inhabits, will get to know his Association's opinion about a post *before it is too late*?

There are occasions, too, when it is hard or impossible for the individual to decide that a salary "appears inadequate." I have had personal experience of this recently: I was almost hoist with my own petard when I sent for an application form for a certain Northern post.

The action I took on that occasion leads me to my second point. May I urge all intending candidates who learn of L.A. action in such cases to withdraw their application, and to write to the authority concerned saying why!—explaining their attitude and affirming their loyal acceptance of their Association's decision. I did. The authority has now regraded the post!

Perhaps L.A. pressure is a wee bit greater than mine, but who knows? Maybe my little effort helped, too. That's my story, anyway!

C. A. CROSSLEY, *Leeds Public Libraries*.

### ***Those Fastidious Females***

It grieves me that the timely and restrained objections expressed by Miss Solomon and Miss Walker about the language used in the review of Mr. McColvin's new book should be greeted in such deplorable bad taste by the editorial caption to the letters. (What the Hell)

Men in the position of Librarians are generally expected to display common courtesy, but such an exhibition blatantly indicates how sadly lacking that quality must be.

WM. BENSON THORNE.

*Mr. Thorne was Editor of the "Assistant" over fifty years ago in 1902-4. It is a pleasure to welcome him back to these pages, even in critical vein.*

*There has been some criticism of Eric Moon's description of A CHANCE TO READ as a "damned good book." On reading Mr. McColvin's work, however, we find that on page 222 he refers to something as "a damned shame," and on page 245 he says "I do not care a damn what system is adopted . . ." No doubt our affronted female correspondents will now be making "timely" complaints to Mr. McColvin about his "poverty of vocabulary," "uncertain ability," "sick journalism," and unprofessional conduct.*

### ***The L.A. Elections***

Why not do something about the Library Association instead of criticizing it unconstructively?

In the Presidential address, part of which was printed in the June, 1955 *Assistant Librarian*, Mr. Bristow said, "I have said it in Council and I now say it publicly, that if the A.A.L. wishes it could nominate members for the 9 London, 15 County and 12 Branch Councillors, and having done that, it could be sure of securing their election. The A.A.L., by organization, could secure at least 38 seats out of the Council of 60."

HERMIONE MACPHEE.

*It would be unconstitutional for the A.A.L. to sponsor candidates for the Library Association Council. Leading members of the A.A.L. do, of course, sometimes stand for election (Mr. Bristow was elected last year, for example) and frequently nominate others. They do so, however, as private members of the L.A. and not in their official A.A.L. capacities.—HON. EDITOR.*

## ***Curvaceous Staff***

In the September, 1956 issue of the *Assistant Librarian* under the heading of "Talking Points" is included an extract from a description of San Diego Public Library, together with an English translation. It is with this translation that I find fault. In the original extract, it is the information desk only which greets the reader, curves out to meet him, and welcome his questions; whereas in the translation, the charging desk, having reared up, etc., is seen to contain a "harassed staff." Now the word "staff" does not occur in the original, and therefore I presume that English librarians may consider themselves as fortunate in this respect: that they are employed *at all*; and not replaced, as would appear to be the case in San Diego, by furniture, made, presumably, from some kind of elastic material capable of performing the serpentine evolutions described in the original extract . . .

In their proper enthusiasm for reforming our libraries, many librarians seem to be making the mistake of thinking that this desirable end can be achieved merely by filling the buildings with *things*, whereas, while agreeing that the majority of public libraries could do with wholesale destruction and rebuilding, there is still need for enthusiastic and well-trained staff, especially staff which could combine efficiency with ability to curve out to greet readers and welcome their questions. . .

R. LLOYD, *Tottenham Public Libraries.*

## ***Gloucester Goonery***

I don't expect your second interview with a predecessor will attract as much correspondence as the first. Few librarians (except chiefs and examiners) will object to what Mr. Snaith has to say and fewer with the way he says it. I am grateful for his demonstration that wide reading is the best training for librarianship; but I wish he had not acquiesced in the lowness of librarians, even though proclaiming their superiority to Baths Managers. A friend of mine, working in another district where a male librarian was supposed to be a chap wot didn't like work, was identified from his reading matter by a bus conductor and consoled on his low condition with the remark that, after all, knowledge was power. He replied that maybe it was, but it wasn't money. Not that one shouldn't be a librarian for the love of the work, but a little more recognition would soothe our egos.

In "Bethnal Green Will Now Say a Few Words" (*Assistant Librarian*, February, 1954) Mr. Snaith warns us that librarianship is funny, though the discovery can be dangerous to sanity. Perhaps the time is ripe for more people to make that discovery, if one can judge the intellectual climate from the enormous popularity of "The Goon Show." Since Mr. Snaith's regal reference to himself by place name, maybe Mr. Bryon will give us the low-down on the Lancashire library system controversy in an article entitled: "This is the famous Eccles"?

P. D. GANN, *Gloucestershire County Library.*

## ***Lancashire Still Stews***

With reference to Mr. G. A. Carter's letter on page 143 of the September *Assistant Librarian*, Mr. Carter is a municipal librarian. If I wished to throw more mud around I could equally claim—thinking of the Manchester area—that "some municipal library systems in the North-West depend somewhat parasitically upon a neighbouring town for a good reference and bibliographical service." This must happen continuously throughout the country: relatively few authorities can afford to build up huge reference collections. Nor would such a static arrangement be any use to residents in a County Council area. The answer, surely, is inter-loan (preferably of one's own stock) and intelligent co-ordination of facilities.

So please, Mr. Carter, and those who echo you, concentrate on the ideal of an adequate national library service. There are good library services and bad ones, but the type of authority to which they belong is not the yard-stick by which to measure their efficiency. The writer has worked in probably the

largest of both types of library authority and finds that there are good and bad points applicable to both. Perhaps the L.A. Proposals are not the complete recipe for success, but at least they are a positive step in the right direction, and that is better than wasting time in suggesting that a municipal system *must* be better than a county.

JAMES A. DEARDEN, *Droylsden Branch, Lancashire County.*

### **Who are these Examiners?**

What is the use of the present Registration exam. paper in the History of English Literature? The only reasonable defence that I have met, is that it makes assistant librarians appear understanding when readers ask for works of English Literature. If there is a welcome trend in recent Registration papers towards a university type of exam. rewarding understanding and judgement rather than memory, that trend has not altered the English Literature paper, and cannot so long as it is based on "authors and titles" and a choice of six questions out of only ten. Such a paper cannot cover the syllabus, and its selection must be arbitrary and unpredictable, since the examinee is aware of no current trend that determines the choice of topics, like those which affect the selection of topics in the papers on librarianship. For the examiners are concerned not with current literary criticism, but with facts and old accepted assessments of authors. Awarding marks for authors and titles, they set questions such as "Show the influence of the Bible on English literature during the 17th century and account for such influence," which cannot be answered with honest regard to the truth of the matter by citing authors and titles for half-an-hour. An attempt to answer such a question would require critical discussion that in half-an-hour would reach very few titles. And who are these examiners who assess the candidates' knowledge after setting questions that demand, for honest answering, powers of literary judgement? Librarians may be the best qualified examiners in librarianship. In literature, there are university qualifications. Is it not rather unintelligent not to have an English Honours graduate on the examiners' board? And is it not illogical to exempt graduates who attend the London University school from Group D, but not other graduates? One is thankful that there is a sensible paper in Literature of Social and Political Ideas.

DAVID W. HOPE, *University College of Wales.*

### **Public Relations**

In your June issue Mr. Greaves says that "the need for a Public Relations Officer [for the L.A.] cannot be minimised," and everyone will be familiar with the thoughts and feelings which gave rise to this expression. Although the problem is universally recognised, the P.R.O. is not universally held to be the solution at the present time.

I wonder if Mr. Greaves changed his mind when he read the June editorial *Shocking Mess*. It is that state of affairs, the inequalities in the standards of the library service throughout the country, that make national publicity difficult and indeed dangerous. The ignorance, indifference and poverty of authorities contribute to this state of affairs, and a P.R.O. would achieve little if he tried to persuade such authorities to improve their services. New legislation with loss of autonomy for some libraries and inspection for all is the only remedy, and until that comes, further effort on the lines of the Library Association's *Centenary Assessment* would at least show authorities what they ought to be doing and might achieve some improvement.

Until the black spots are enlightened, whether voluntarily or by legislation, the advertising of the library service must remain a local responsibility, and I feel that insufficient thought is being given to this subject nowadays. Attempts to ape business advertising, either locally or nationally, are doomed to failure.

A. H. WATKINS, *Deputy Librarian, Bromley.*

# A Point of View Called Fred

*By Ivor Kemp, Tottenham Public Libraries*

What a weary, plaguy, stale and flat lot are the counter staffs of England—and beyond, I shouldn't wonder. It is hardly surprising. That the average intelligent, naturally fairly polite library assistant should tend to become unsympathetic, moody and generally numskulled in the face of horde upon queue of readers, and a thousand and one comments on the weather, is inevitable where circumstances prevail under which he is thrust into a counter and left with his righteous unbringing and embryo sense of public service to see him through. That is, whilst we continue to suffer from what Bernard Shaw wrote in a different context: "The notion that inspiration is something that happened thousands of years ago, and was then finished and done with, never to occur again." Most of us have every appearance of having once read the aims of public librarianship in the introductory chapter of a textbook preparing us for the first professional examination, and then having done our mightiest to forget them.

The faults are many. We find "issue" and "class mark" and other technical jargon being used by assistants in conversation with readers: the unskilful "playing off" of enquiries. Uninterestedness. And at about mid-afternoon, when life begins to pall, one notices a suspension of common courtesies—"good afternoons" are skipped—and the pervasion of the attitude that the most important thing about the lady now entering the library is the ridiculous hat that she is wearing. The assistant takes on the aspect of a "take it or leave it" shopkeeper of the rationing era. That type of shopkeeper has mended his ways through economic necessity of a kind that scarcely exists in public librarianship. The public librarian has no worries about competition; his livelihood is so secure that he can, and too often does, do his work in mediocre and unimaginative fashion. Lacking, having chosen not to tolerate, economic pressure as a means to competence, we need some other, better, thing to shake us out of the rut. Inspiration is not too high falutin' a word to use for the shaking.

The proficiency of staff can be said to spring from three main sources:

- (a) The individual concerned in so far as he is naturally inclined to his work. That facility in a person that enables him to tackle an entirely new task as though to the manner born; which in fact, he is.
- (b) The individual concerned in so far as he is economically and inquisitively bent. His inclination to make himself more proficient by reading professional literature, attending courses and so forth.
- (c) Calculated inspiration, by his superiors on the staff, at the point where natural ability and enthusiasm fails. The presence or absence of this can radically affect the attitude of the individual to his work. Absence, in this sense, does not make the heart grow fonder.

It seems reasonable to suppose that general satisfaction and morale will become less great as one passes from the chief librarian (sense of achievement; prospect of being able to put one's ideas into practice) to the senior assistants, readers advisers or wot not (close association with books and the public; the surprise element of readers' advisory work, and the satisfaction of its successful accomplishment) to the junior assistant mainly concerned with routine procedures and "Orful weather

innit?" contact with the public. The junior assistant is, then, the problem child—the most likely to be discontented, not yet having made the first break in his career. His position is analogous with the axiom of our children's libraries:—that "the child of to-day is the adult reader of to-morrow, and therefore deserves special attention." An added difficulty is the lack of application in certain quarters, particularly among assistants awaiting conscription for National Service, and amongst those married women and engaged young ladies who are counting the days to their retirement to recep. bed. k. and b.

The junior assistant in his counter is not an unimportant member of the staff. He is commonly the reader's first human contact with the library. Further, when he addresses a reader on such tiresomenesses as membership forms, limitation of tickets, prohibition of smoking, fines, expiry dates, etc., he is dealing with matters that need handling with much tact—red tape affairs about which the man in the street takes umbrage as a matter of course. It is well known that a suspicion that he has been wrongly charged a fine can put a reader at his bloody-mindedmost. He will be sure to tell his friends.

The amount of goodwill that the counter assistant can win or lose for public librarianship is, it seems, considered of small import by the high-ups of the profession. Rarely is much care taken to provide the junior with the techniques and gambits necessary to deal with a diversity of ticklish situations, or to keep him in the frame of mind to cope with them.

Broadly speaking, it appears, the present-day management of library staffs require greater emphasis on the following points:—

- (1) Keeping before the staff the ideals of librarianship and the importance of the reader as an individual, not as a fraction of the mob. An unenviable task replete with difficulties, requiring great subtlety and juxtapositioning of grey heads. It is time someone died in the attempt.
- (2) The training of Staff; equipping the individual with techniques require for the task in hand.
- (3) Keeping the staff informed of local library policy, and, thereby, eliminating roots of rumour and uncertainty which are deadly to cordial staff relations. The editorial of September's *Assistant Librarian* contained a good maxim: "An informed staff is a contented staff."
- (4) The setting of good examples by each member of the staff to his juniors and the duty of morale raising generally, and especially during periods of frustration which every junior assistant but the most stolid, through the very nature of his duties, must suffer from. There was more to Lord Nelson's pacing, arrayed in medal-flecked glory, his quarter-deck in thick of battle—there was more to it than mere romantic tomnodder. Dare anyone say that the battle of the books is less important?

### Hepworth's Assistance to Readers

A new extensively revised edition of Hepworth's *Primer of Assistance to Readers* will be ready shortly. As the future of this section of the Registration syllabus is in doubt, only a small number of copies have been printed. To reduce the price to students as much as possible, this edition appears in a special economy format which will not normally be used for A.A.L. publications. The price is 8s. 0d. to members (10s. 6d. to others). Place your orders with the Honorary Education and Sales Officer, 49, Halstead Gardens, London, N.21.

## Talking Points

**Conversion of Branch Libraries into Public Conveniences.** This was the startling announcement in the *Manchester Guardian* on 14th September. The Borough of Macclesfield was inviting tenders for the conversion. President Tynemouth, who sent me the cutting, commented that he had often seen libraries that looked as though they had been converted the other way but never this before. We await with interest the next advertisement for Chartered Librarians at Macclesfield and hope that their duties will be exactly specified.

**Many Assistants** will now be attending evening classes. It is surprising how many of them from public libraries do not claim their fees from the local authorities. They are normally entitled to do so under the post-entry training scheme. If you are not familiar with this, ask your NALGO representative or senior librarian. Most progressive authorities also allow time off for classes. If assistants are not getting it they should approach their chief librarians on the matter and, of that fails, ask NALGO to act.

**Criticism** has recently been directed at Mr. K. C. Harrison for the type of paper set for the Registration English Literature (Modern Period) Examination. In fact, Mr. Harrison is now Chief Examiner for the earlier period and has nothing to do with this paper. The Chief Examiner for the modern period is Miss H. M. McGill, F.L.A. In fairness, it should be pointed out, however, that ultimate responsibility rests with the subject assessor who in this case is Mr. Berwick Sayers, F.L.A.

**From a student's essay:** The reference library—here should be rare and obscure books and hangings of a promising local painter.

W. G. SMITH.

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# From Film Strips to Folkestone

*Council Notes—13th September 1956*

The Council's day commenced with a film performance at an hour to which only the juvenile Saturday-morning cinema addicts are accustomed. At the opening of the meeting in the afternoon the President expressed our thanks to Mr. Howard Phillips and the Sheffield City Libraries for giving us the opportunity to see the encouragingly professional colour film *Books in Hand*, of which details appeared in the last issue of this journal. Also included in the programme were some excellent cartoon filmstrips produced at such incredibly low cost that the thought must have occurred to many that it does not need a library with the resources of Sheffield to produce good publicity economically.

An item at the other end of the agenda advertised a preview of another kind of caricature which might well be labelled the *Folkestone Follies* (and *is*.—Ed.). A vacillating, almost lethargic, start by the Council was halted by the President's heavily emphasised question, "Is there *anyone* in favour of *that*?" relating to item 6 on the L.A. Annual General Meeting agenda. Thus guided by the obvious impartiality of the Chair the Council decided unanimously to oppose the motion calling for the abolition of the postal ballot. After further discussion it was agreed also to oppose items 7, 8 and 9 on the A.G.M. agenda, but only should it prove necessary. The A.A.L. is not anxious to aggravate the disunity which already exists to a dangerous degree within the Association, and our attitude to item 8 (the motion aimed at reversing the Association's policy on libraries and local government reorganisation) might adequately be summarised by using a film-cutting technique to wed several comments made in Council: "We are opposed but do not wish to precipitate a discussion on it . . . however, if the waters are already troubled Mr. Smith will dive in . . . and bring them to the boil."

Reverting to chronology, the Council passed from the formal approval of the minutes to consideration of the now standing item, "posts at inadequate salaries." Reports of partially successful action taken by the Library Association in connection with posts advertised at Middlesbrough, Wakefield and Oldham since the last meeting were received. Our representatives on the L.A. Membership Committee are to take up the question of the position of candidates for those posts which have been reggraded but not completely in accordance with the figure suggested by the Library Association.

A motion which is being passed to the L.A. by the Reference and Special Libraries Section was considered, and our representatives on the L.A. Council are to support this plea for the organisation of co-operative schemes for the provision of technical and commercial information and library services in suitable areas.

The Library Association are to be asked to make further representations to B.N.B. concerning the entries for A.A.L. publications. The convenience of the compiler, rather than convenience of the user, seems to dictate the recent ruling that our publishing address and special price for members should be omitted.

The report on the arrangements so far made for the next week-end conference at Winchester next April, met with some criticism. The Conference Committee had discussed eleven divisional proposals for a theme, and has so narrowly preferred Bristol's suggestion *The Compleat Librarian* to London's *The Librarian and Automation* that the latter was recommended for further consideration next year. Messrs. Baumfield, Bristow and Carver led an attempt to reverse the committee decision but Council, while not altogether endorsing Mr. Tomlinson's view of automation as so much "hoo-ha" (if that is the correct spelling), rejected their amendment. Mr. A. C. Jones then queried

the recommended use of such "old war-horses" as Messrs. Clough and Tyne-mouth as discussion leaders, and asked if there were no new names forthcoming. There were not.

Miss Willson, after a rather more active year than is usual for a Vice-President, is to succeed as President for 1957, an honour richly deserved and no little overdue. The election of Vice-President tested the President's knowledge of Standing Orders, and only on the second ballot did one floating-voter enable a decision to be reached between two worthy candidates, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Tomlinson. The election of Mr. Tomlinson to this office is just reward for his work over a number of years, particularly in the field of education.

We left to "lie on the table" a report compiled with much blood, sweat and tears by the Greater London Division during the past two years. The problems of standardising stationery and methods in libraries appear to remain intractable. One wonders why standards and a degree of standardisation are possibilities in other fields but only dirty words in the library service and profession.

Folkestone fully discussed, we closed on a pleasant public relations note from Mr. Davey, who reported that only two candidates gained merits in the new First Professional Examination. *Both* were A.A.L. correspondence course students. Book early for the next course on how to win marks and influence examiners.

A word in conclusion seems necessary in view of recent correspondence. This is not a *full report*. It is not even fully-dressed on this occasion, Mr. Bristow's favourite headings having been omitted. There is not room in the *Assistant* for all the details of four committees and one Council meeting, and the Honorary Editor would rightly cut half of them out if I tried to reproduce them. Many of them are not worth including and nobody in his right mind would read them. You have national and divisional officers. If you want details about what goes on, ask them. It's part of their job. You have only to ask. There are no closed doors, only limited pages.

ERIC MOON.

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